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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (12/08): Hopes Run High for EU
Recognition of Palestinian Capital

Main Stories:

East Jerusalem: EU Proposal

Dailies report that the EU Foreign Ministers will continue their meetings today in Brussels discussing the Swedish proposal to recognize East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state. The dailies and independent news outlet Ma'an report that the Palestinian Authority (PA) cabinet urged the EU to adopt what it termed "clear positions in accordance with international law."

PA official daily Al-Hayat Al-Jadida headlines a quote by Jean Asselborn, Luxembourg's Foreign Minister that East Jerusalem "is occupied and does not belong to Israel." Italy's Foreign Minister Franco Frattini is quoted in Al-Hayat Al-Jadida saying the EU should not decide the fate of Jerusalem without proper negotiations. Al-Ayyam front-paged a report quoting Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida, senior Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, urging EU Foreign Ministers to reject the proposition calling for East Jerusalem as the future capital of a Palestinian state.

Abbas' Visit to Lebanon

PA President Abbas' visit to Lebanon and meetings with Lebanese President and senior officials is prominently featured in local media. According to the coverage, Abbas stressed that there is no

alternative to the peace process, and reiterated his opposition to resettling Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. He pointed out that Palestinian presidential and legislative elections can be held in June 2010 only if Hamas signs the national reconciliation paper prepared by Egypt.

Palestinian Reconciliation

Dailies and Ma'an report that Egypt intends to propose a new suggestion to the Hamas-Fatah reconciliation plan, focusing on disputed points. According to the reports, Egypt will give both sides the opportunity to accept or refuse the plan as a whole, but will not allow amendments. A delegation from the Palestinian Reconciliation Committee, committed to trying to find a solution to the impasse and reach conciliation, arrived in Cairo on Sunday and held its first meeting yesterday.

Prisoner Swap

Local press continues to report contradictory statements made by Hamas officials in Gaza and Syria concerning the prisoner exchange

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deal. Al-Quds reports that a Hamas official in Damascus stated that the general framework for the swap is ready and that the "ball is now in the Israeli court." According to the official, Hamas allowed a French medical delegation to visit Shalit, which contradicts claims by Mahmoud Zahhar, a senior Hamas leader in Gaza that the French delegation was not allowed to visit. Al-Ayyam quotes Abbas saying that the PA will never accept the deporting of any Palestinian. (Comment: We believe this is the first time Abbas has publically taken a position on this issue.)

Settlement Freeze

Al-Quds reports on Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's meeting with Likud party members yesterday, in which he stressed that the settlement moratorium is temporary and serves broader Israeli national security interests. Al-Quds reports that Kadima party leader Tzipi Livni has said that it is unfair to compare large settlement units with random smaller outposts. According to reports, Livni said that the international community and settlers must realize that Israel's national interests come first. In related news, settlers continue to protest against the GOI moratorium decision. Settlers are planning a large demonstration tomorrow afternoon in West Jerusalem to protest the settlement freeze. Between 10,000 and 15,000 protesters are expected to participate in the demonstration, which will pass in front of the Consulate's Lazarist compound.

H1N1 Deaths in Gaza

Al Ayaam reports a third death from H1N1 in Gaza. According to the article, the PA accuses Hamas of barring Palestinian patients from leaving the territory for medical treatment. According to Ma'an, the Health Ministry in the de facto government in Gaza denied the claims, saying that they allow ambulances to leave Gaza through Erez Crossing to transport patients to hospitals in Jerusalem and Israel.

BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Al-Quds runs an editorial under the title "Was The European

Message Delivered?" in which the writer asserts that no matter what decision is reached in today's meeting of EU Foreign Ministers, Israel got the message that Europe rejects all Israeli measures and policies in East Jerusalem.

2) Hani Al-Masri, writing in Al-Ayyam under the title "Stopping the Negotiations With No Alternative is Worse Than Pursuing Them," opines that Abbas' announcement not to run for election is not a solution. According to Al Masri, there must be an initiative to forge a new path to help Palestinians achieve their national goals. Al-Masri believes that Palestinians should not wait to see what the e US and Israel will propose because "we [Palestinians] know by now what they will propose."

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